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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [SP](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR HITS RIGHT NOTES WITH NEW SPANISH
MILITARY LEADERSHIP

REF: A. MADRID 790
[1](#)B. MADRID 1021
[1](#)C. DAO MADRID IIR 6 889 0272 08
[1](#)D. DAO MADRID IIR 6 889 0273 08
[1](#)E. DAO MADRID IIR 6 889 0274 08

Classified By: DCM Arnold A. Chacon, for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Ambassador Aguirre ensured that Spain's outgoing Chief of Defense and the Chiefs of the Spanish Army, Navy and Air Force Staff were properly celebrated September [1](#)25. Hosting a cocktail reception for more than 90 attendees, complete with a color guard and a 6-piece military jazz band, the Ambassador recognized the exemplary careers of the retiring military leadership and honored the new "cupola." During a round of courtesy calls begun September 15 with the new CHOD, Ambassador Aguirre was able to meet the new leadership one-on-one, reinforcing the excellent military-to-military relationship and engaging the new chiefs on key USG interests. The calls also served to introduce his new Deputy Chief of Mission and to explain the U.S. election timetable that could result in an extended period as Charge d'Affaires.

//VALEDICTORY "RAZZMATAZZ"//

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Ambassador hosted the reception in honor of General Felix Sanz Roldan, the recently departed CHOD who has assumed a new role as special envoy for EU defense matters, and the recently departed Chiefs of Staff of the Air Force and Army and the former CNO. The CHOD and all the service chiefs were relieved on July 21 (ref A). Naval Station Rota provided a Joint Color Guard and the Sixth Fleet Band provided a six-piece Jazz Ensemble. The event, unusual by Spanish military standards that do not allow for "change of command" ceremonies, per se, was a huge success with the honorees and their wives in attendance as well as the current CHOD, and the new Air Force Chief of Staff and Chief of Naval Operations. Ambassador Aguirre addressed each of the outgoing officers and presented flags that had flown over the U.S. Embassy to retiring CNO Admiral Zaragoza, former Air Force Chief of Staff General Garcia de la Vega, and outgoing Spanish Army Chief of Staff General Villar. To General Sanz, the Ambassador presented a framed edition of the "Don't Tread on Me" flag flown over U.S. Navy ships since September 11, and explained its historical symbolism dating back to the Revolutionary War. Sanz spoke extemporaneously following the Ambassador's remarks, recalling how his close association with U.S. forces from the earliest days of his military career had been instrumental to his professional success and

his enduring goodwill toward the United States.

13. (C) In the lead-up to the unprecedented hail and farewell party, Ambassador Aguirre sought courtesy calls with the entire new cupola. He congratulated each officer on his new position, reviewed key programs in the jurisdiction of each of the services, and reviewed the robust exchange relationships between U.S. and Spanish military academies and staff colleges.

//CHIEF OF DEFENSE GENERAL RODRIGUEZ//

14. (C) Spanish Air Force Lieutenant General Jose Julio Rodriguez Fernandez was named Chief of Defense (JEMAD) of the Spanish Armed Forces on July 18 and replaced General Sanz on July 21 (ref A). General Rodriguez is a fighter-attack pilot by background. With 42 years of military service, he most recently served as the Director General for Armament and Materiel in the Ministry of Defense (the senior uniformed acquisition official). During the Ambassador's September 15 courtesy call, Rodriguez was pleasant and low-key and conveyed obvious admiration and good feeling toward his predecessor. The Ambassador congratulated Rodriguez on his promotion and invited him to take part in the planned reception. Rodriguez, who was originally not scheduled to be in town September 25, told the Ambassador that "things could change" and, in fact, attended.

15. (C) The CHOD briefed the Ambassador on the meeting of NATO CHODS he had attended in Bulgaria the weekend of September 13, especially the considerable time spent discussing Georgia. Rodriguez also made reference to turning the page

in Afghanistan, expressing the idea that the U.S. election presented opportunities for the Zapatero Administration to modify some of its foreign policy positions. The Ambassador and the CHOD agreed there was no baggage between the United States and Spain on Afghanistan. The Ambassador also referenced shared Spanish and U.S. interests in the context of the U.S. Africa Command. The Ambassador sought the CHOD's views on the likelihood Spain would sign a Letter of Agreement by October 31 to purchase Tomahawk missiles. Rodriguez indicated the action was with the MOD and noted the draft 2009 budget -- with not more than a 5 per cent increase expected over last year -- was not out yet. Rodriguez indicated that the Navy, in accordance with Spanish procedure, must present its case for this requirement to the Ministry of Defense. The Ambassador asked him to let us know if there was a problem. Turning to other potential acquisitions, the Ambassador told Rodriguez that the United States hoped that the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) could be the solution to Spain's long-term requirement for modern tactical aircraft replacements for its Air Force and Navy. Again citing Spain's process for filling these kinds of requirements, Rodriguez allowed that, for the fighter requirement, the process was just beginning. Finally, GEN Rodriguez agreed to host Admiral Fitzgerald for Spain's National Day observance the weekend of October 11, including securing an invitation to the King's reception.

//CHIEF OF SPANISH NAVY STAFF ADMIRAL REBOLLO//

16. (C) In office calls on September 18, the Ambassador reinforced the same points with the new Chief of Naval Operations and the Army's Chief of Staff. Admiral Rebollo, who assumed his duties July 21, was warm and engaging. He had been former CNO Admiral Zaragoza's Vice Chief of Naval Operations and is expected to continue to support Zaragoza's naval initiatives. He has the distinction of having started his military career as an enlisted man. Rebollo also said the Tomahawk decision was now going to the MOD, and he was hopeful but not certain the MOD would approve the purchase. Concerning piracy, the Admiral observed Spain's deployment of a P-3 maritime patrol aircraft was more of a political show than a substantive military action. The Ambassador asked that Spain consider hosting the headquarters portion of forthcoming AFRICOM and SOCEUR Flintlock exercise (originally intended for Mauritania), and Admiral Rebollo agreed to

consider it. (NOTE: On October 9 we received formal agreement from Spain to host this important exercise at Rota. End note.)

//CHIEF OF SPANISH ARMY STAFF GENERAL COLL//

17. (C) Also on September 18, the Ambassador thanked General Fulgencio Coll for Spain's contributions to overseas deployments in Lebanon, Kosovo, Bosnia, and Afghanistan and sought Coll's views on the possibility of lifting the cap of 3,000 on Spanish overseas deployments. General Coll was very warm and engaging and seemed pleased the Ambassador was making the call. Prior to his July 18 appointment (ref A), Coll had carried out two of this Socialist Government's most significant military decisions) the withdrawal from Iraq in 2004 and the establishment of the Emergency Military Unit (UME, or Unidad Militar de Emergencia) in 2006. GEN Coll was born in Palma de Mallorca and comes from a distinguished Balearic military and political family. His father, Fulgencio Coll de San Simon, was also a general in the Spanish Army and former President of Provincial Deputation, as well as Civil Governor of Bilbao in the 1970s. GEN Coll entered the Spanish military academy in 1966 and graduated as an infantry branch lieutenant in 1970. Unlike other Spanish general officers, he has spent long periods of time in troop units and especially in command positions as a senior officer.

//CHIEF OF SPANISH AIR FORCE STAFF GENERAL JIMENEZ//

18. (C) The new head of the Spanish Air Force, General Jose Jimenez Ruiz, also warmly received Ambassador Aguirre on September 25, just hours before the reception in his honor. During the 30-minute call, followed by a tour of Air Force headquarters, General Jimenez spoke openly about his family. The Ambassador reiterated to Jimenez his thanks for Spain's contributions to overseas deployments. Until May 2008,

Jimenez had served as the commander of the Spanish Air Forces in the Canary Islands (ref A). He was a surprise pick for the top Air Force job, advancing from being a soon-to-retire 2-star general to a four-star Chief virtually overnight. According to DAO sources, he was considering retirement from the Canaries in May, when he was told by someone in the Ministry of Defense not to submit his paperwork. Within the month, he had received a promotion to Lieutenant General, a fact unknown to then-Air Force Chief of Staff, General Garcia de la Vega. When the Minister of Defense replaced the Chief of Defense and all three service chiefs in July, General Jimenez was given a fourth star and named Air Force Chief of Staff.

//Comment//

19. (C) We enjoyed a very close relationship with the previous CHOD and service chiefs. The initial encounters with their replacements suggest that excellent working relationship is going to continue. The Spanish military is highly disciplined to its civilian leadership, but it is worth remembering that whatever our differences with Spanish politicians, the armed forces are always well-disposed to work with the U.S., both bilaterally and the context of NATO. The agreement to host the Flintlock exercise, obtained on very short notice when events in Mauritania made that venue inadvisable, is important in and of itself, but it is also a symbol of how healthy the military-to-military relationship is.

AGUIRRE